

## COUNTRY DIARY

**D**ESPITE the arrival of yet another cold snap, lengthening days are beginning to deliver tentative signs of approaching spring.

Catkins of alder trees are beginning to lengthen, a sure sign that they'll soon be shedding pollen. If you cut an alder twig and keep it in a vase in a warm room you can hasten this process and with a few days its catkins will produce a cloud of pollen when you give them a gentle tap. Under natural conditions the pollen, carried on the wind, must reach tiny cone-shaped female flowers which are less than half an inch long so, to maximise success, wind-pollinated trees like alder tend to flower very early in the season, long before leaves can unfurl and hinder pollen transfer. Hazel, poplar and walnut trees all reproduce in the same way, carrying catkins and female flowers on bare twigs early in the year.

The other trees that are showing signs of growth now are willows, whose bud scales are loosening to reveal a glimpse of silky-haired catkins inside which, sometime in March, will produce their golden stamens and green stigmas. Unlike most other trees, which carry flowers of both sexes, willow trees tend to be either all male or all female and since individual trees of each sex can be separated by substantial distances this makes pollination an even more precarious event. But, by delaying pollen production until late March these trees can use the first insects that emerge in spring – queen bees, butterflies like peacocks, commas and small tortoiseshells and various flies – to act as go-betweens. To tempt them to visit, willow catkins need to produce nectar, a cost they wind-pollinated trees don't need to pay for their pollination services.

Phil Gates

## BIRDWATCH

**F**LOCKS of wintering gulls are always worth scanning through carefully as birders at the South Gare proved with the discovery of a small and dainty trans-Atlantic rarity.

The adult Bonaparte's Gull spent around 90 minutes on the seaward side of the breakwater last Friday afternoon before it flew off towards Seaton Snook to vanish from the local scene.

The species, which breeds from southern Canada to Alaska and frequents coasts and the Great Lakes in winter, has only twice been recorded locally, at Teesmouth between August-October 1977 and at Saltburn in November 2006.

There also seems to have been a light influx of other rarer gulls. Last week's Iceland Gull remained at Blyth but others were found at Cowpen Bewley, Hetton Lyons Country Park and at Sunderland. A Glaucous Gull remained at Saltburn and another was at Marske.

Uncommon geese continued to be an attraction in Northumberland. Up to 16 Tundra Bean Geese gathered around Grindon Lough and five were found on the coast at Low Newton. The ten regular Greenland White-fronts remained at Grindon and four others frequented Woodhorn, near Ashington.

A Bittern remained at Coatham Marsh and another showed occasionally at East Chevington where a 'ringtail' Hen Harrier regularly hunted. The only adult cock Hen Harrier was at Haltwhistle.

The Black-throated Thrush had a third week at Newholm and, judging from various websites, must surely be this winter's most photographed British rarity.

Despite the return of snow and ice, there were some signs of spring. A few Blackbirds and Mistle Thrushes were singing and Ravens were in full display at upland breeding sites I checked last weekend. Despite four feet of snow on one crag which they share uneasily with a pair of Peregrine, Raven display was constantly interrupted by an aggressive cock falcon determined to keep them off their end of the cliff.

Ian Kerr

## WALKS



By  
Mark Reid

## POINTS OF INTEREST

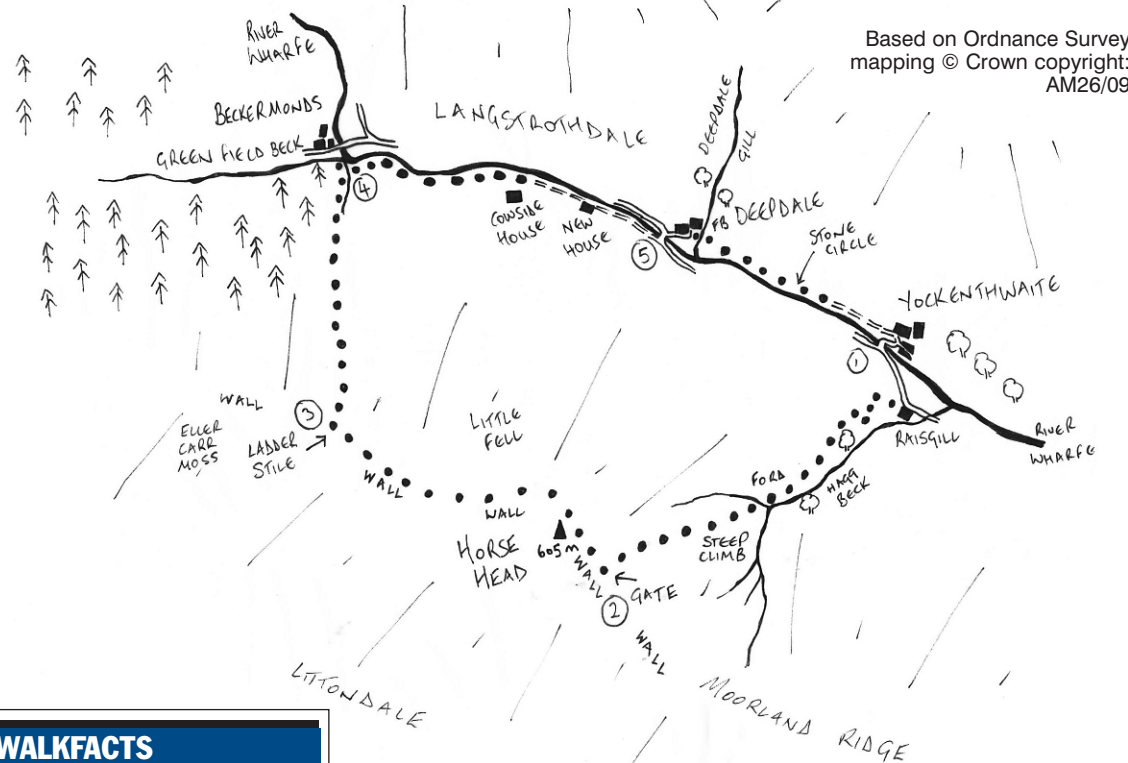
**T**HERE are 42 mountains, fells and hills in the Yorkshire Dales with a height of 600 metres or more, and a relative height of over 20 metres. Every fortnight (weather permitting) over the next two years I am going to chart a walk to the top of each and every one of them; this will take me until Christmas 2011 to complete. Some of the mountains are well-known and well-trodden, such as Ingleborough (724m) and Great Shunner Fell (716m), whilst others are hardly ever walked such as Water Crag (668m) and Yockenthwaite Moor (643m). The highest is Whernside (736m) and the lowest is Brownber Head (600m), which is also probably the most inaccessible. So, in no particular order, here is the first of the 42 mountains, fells and hills in the Yorkshire Dales – Horse Head (605m), a vast moorland ridge between Littondale and Langstrothdale.

This walk starts at Yockenthwaite in Langstrothdale, as the upper reaches of the River Wharfe are known. There is a timeless beauty here where little seems to have changed since the Viking settlers came here over a thousand years ago. The place names echo the voices of those Norse settlers; Yockenthwaite means Eogan's clearing, Beckermonds means meeting of the streams, Deepdale means the deep valley and Langstrothdale means the long valley that is marshy and overgrown. From Raisgill Farm, a long climb ensues up onto the broad moorland ridge of Horse Head between Langstrothdale and Littondale. The views from the top of Horse Head are superb, with the Yorkshire Three Peaks clearly visible. A wonderful high-level walk now takes you along the top of this ridge to join the footpath that links Halton Gill with Beckermonds, which you follow back down into Langstrothdale. The final section of this walk is a delightful riverside path alongside the playful Wharfe with its many small waterfalls.

## THE WALK

**1** From Yockenthwaite Bridge across the River Wharfe (with your back to the bridge), turn left along the unfenced road and follow it gently rising up for 500 metres, with the river just down to your left at first then bearing away from the river to reach Raisgill Farm. Just before you reach Raisgill Farm and a cattle grid across the road, turn right along a bridgeway (signpost Halton Gill and No Vehicles sign) and follow the path up the small, low limestone outcrop just ahead, immediately above which (parallel with Raisgill Farm across to your left) turn sharp right (signpost Halton Gill via Horse Head) along a grassy path. Follow this path steadily up for about 100 metres then, where it levels out on a narrow shelf of land, follow the path bending sharply round to the left then straight on for a short distance then, where the ground steepens, head off to the left (by the solitary hawthorn tree) along a slightly sunken path. Follow this sunken path snaking up the hillside, with the valley of Hagg Beck falling away to your left, for about 250 metres to reach the head of a shallow dry gully on your left (that feeds into Hagg Beck) where you continue along the grassy path climbing up the hillside to soon reach the top of another dry, shallow gully. The gradient now eases and you continue straight on climbing steadily up along the clear, grassy path, with the ravine of Hagg Beck falling away down to your left. After

## Horse Head



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## WALKFACTS

**Distance:** 10 km (6.25 miles)

**Time:** 3 – 4 hours

**Maps:** OS Explorer Sheet OL30 – always take a map on your walk.

**Start/Parking:** Limited roadside parking available on the grass verge between Yockenthwaite bridge (with its red post box) and Raisgill Farm, grid reference SD 905 788. Please park considerably.

**Refreshments:** No facilities en route. George Inn at Hubberholme close by.

**Terrain:** A grassy and then stony path climbs steadily up from Raisgill Farm all the way to the top of the moorland ridge of Horse Head, with some steep sections and rough ground. A wall is then followed along the top of this broad moorland ridge, passing Horse Head trig point (605 metres) all the way to Eller Carr Moss from where a path leads quite steeply down a rough and boggy hillside to Beckermonds. A riverside path then leads down through the valley back to Yockenthwaite.

**How to get there:** Yockenthwaite lies in Langstrothdale (upper reaches of Wharfedale) on the minor road between Gayle (near Hawes) and Buckden.

**Open Access Land:** The section between Horse Head and Eller Carr Moss heads across Open Access Land. [openaccess.gov.uk](http://openaccess.gov.uk)

**Caution:** This is a strenuous walk up onto the broad moorland ridge between Langstrothdale and Littondale, climbing to a height of 605 metres on Horse Head. This ridge is exposed to the elements, with boggy or wet ground in places. The ascent and descent to and from this ridge is long and quite steep in places. OS map and hill-walking gear essential.

a while, the path levels out and leads straight on, with the ravine of Hagg Beck to your left, all the way to reach a small ford across a side-stream near the head of Hagg Beck (at the foot of the steep slope of the moorland ridge of Horse Head in front of you). Cross this stream and follow the clear stony path ahead winding steeply up at first then straightening out and climbing steadily up across the moorland ridge for 1km to reach a gate in a wall across your path at the top of Horse Head (SD 889 776)

**2** As you reach the gate in the wall at the top of the moorland pass, turn right (do not head through the

gate) and walk alongside the wall on your left gently rising up across the broad moorland ridge for 400 metres to reach the top of Horse Head (trig point just over the wall to your left). From the trig point, continue straight on alongside the wall on your left heading across the top of the moorland ridge for a further 200 metres to reach a small gate in a wall across your path. Head through this gate and continue straight on alongside the wall on your left across the top of the moorland ridge for 1 km (Little Fell) to reach a stile over a fence/wall across your path, after which continue straight on alongside the wall for a further 300 metres (very gradually descending along the top of the broad ridge) to reach a tumbledown wall across your path. Head through this tumbledown wall and carry straight on alongside the wall for 150 metres to reach a ladder stile over the wall to your left (footpath between Halton Gill and Beckermonds – SD 874 785).

**3** Do not cross this ladder stile but turn right (right-angle from the wall) along a grassy path heading across the moorland ridge away from the wall back towards Langstrothdale. After just over 100 metres you reach a small section of stone wall/windbreak, just beyond which the gradient steepens – carry straight on along the rough path heading down for a further 150 metres to reach a small cairn where you follow the clear path bending sharp left slanting down across the steep hillside then curving round to the right before heading straight down the rough, grassy hillside (heading towards the hamlet of Beckermonds at the bottom of the valley by the bottom corner of the forest and the confluence of the Wharfe and Green Field Beck). Follow the narrow grassy path straight on steadily down the left-hand side of the middle of the rough hillside (with the tumbledown wall and then the forest about 100 metres across to your left) then, about two-thirds of the way down the hillside, you join the head of a gully/stream where you follow the path down along the left-hand side of this gully all the way to reach a gate in a wall at the bottom of the hillside just above the confluence of the River Wharfe and Green Field Beck (bottom corner of the forest just to your left, and Beckermonds just across the river ahead).

**4** Do not head through this gate but turn right (signpost Deepdale, Dales Way) along the

bottom of the field to quickly reach a gate in the corner, after which bear left down along the riverside path (signpost Dales Way) – ignore the track ascending up to the right. Follow this riverside path alongside the Wharfe on your left for 200 metres to reach a gateway in a wall across your path (river on your left). Head through the gateway and follow the clear riverside path heading down through Langstrothdale for 1.4 km to reach the riverside house of New House (path becomes a track as you approach this house). Carry straight on along the riverside track (ignore the footbridge) for 500 metres to reach the road beside Deepdale Bridge.

**5** Turn left across the bridge, immediately after which head right along the farm lane up towards the hamlet of Deepdale (signpost Dales Way, Yockenthwaite). Where the land bends round to the left as you approach the houses of Deepdale, head off the lane to the right through a small wall-gate (signpost), after which head straight on across the small field then bear slightly left to quickly reach a footbridge across Deepdale Gill. After the footbridge, bear left up the bank to join the wall along the top of the field (signpost) where you carry straight on alongside this wall on your left (do not head through the gate in the wall) and follow this wall round to reach a small wall-gate (National Trust sign). After the gate, head straight on gently dropping down across two fields and through a gate just beside the river on your right, after which head straight on along the wide grassy path (river just to your right) to soon reach Yockenthwaite stone circle. From the stone circle, carry straight on along the wide grassy path across fields (and through gates) – the path becomes a track that leads into Yockenthwaite. As you reach the houses, follow the track bending round and down to the right back to reach Yockenthwaite Bridge across the River Wharfe. One down, forty-one fells to go!

Mark Reid

Author of The Inn Way guidebooks  
[innway.co.uk](http://innway.co.uk)

See photos of this walk at  
<http://yorkshiredales600s.blogspot.com>

■ While every effort is made to ensure that walks are accessible and are rights of way, The Northern Echo cannot guarantee that fields, paths or pubs will be open. If you are walking in the countryside, please remember the Country Code.  
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